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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study examined the career and lifestyle determinants of 201 gifted women who became homemakers, career-focused, or both homemakers and career-focused. A ten-year follow-up questionnaire collected data for (1) determining existing differences in parental influence, impact of education, career determinants, self-perceptions and evaluations, and current interests and values between groups with divergent lifestyles and (2) examining the role of variables, such as persistence, independence, and mental stability in women's career plans. Results seemed to dispel some myths associated with the forced choice many women believe they must make. One-third of the sample successfully integrated career and family. Career-oriented women derived satisfaction from personal relationships and hobbies as well as their work. Furthermore, 57% of the career group still considered the possibility of having children. Career preparedness and maternal occupation were not found to differentiate between groups. Perception of good mental stability as a contributor to one's life achievements was found to be significantly higher among the integrators. Attitudes of independence were more prominent among groups pursuing careers. Based on study results, two counseling goals were identified for working with gifted women: (1) providing information geared towards dispelling myths forcing a choice between career and family and (2) facilitating personal growth and development of autonomy of gifted women. (YLB)

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CAREER AND LIFESTYLE DETERMINANTS OF GIFTED WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

There are several existing myths about career and lifestyle planning for women which have perpetuated the belief in many women that they must make a choice between career and family. Gifted women, in particular, may experience conflict in this area as they are simultaneously reinforced for their abilities while taught that traditional female roles are more acceptable. The present study examines the career and lifestyle determinants of 201 gifted women who became Homemakers, Career-focused, or integrated the two. The data were collected in a longitudinal follow-up study and results seem to dispel some myths associated with the forced choice many women believe they must make. A large number of women in this sample were able to successfully integrate career and family. Furthermore, the Career-focused group derived as much satisfaction from their personal relationships and avocations as they did from their work. They also did not seem to perceive themselves as "stuck" in their present lifestyle, as the majority of this group still considered the option of having children. Finally, good mental stability was one of the most important determinants of the Integrator role. Independent attitudes seemed to contribute to a career orientation. Suggested counseling goals are: 1) providing gifted women with information that helps dispel the societal myths which contribute to a forced choice between career and family; and 2) facilitation of personal growth and autonomy in gifted women. Programs are suggested for implementing these goals.

CAREER AND LIFESTYLE DETERMINANTS OF GIFTED WOMEN

Introduction

Historically, career and family have been seen as two mutually exclusive options for women (Matthews & Tiedman, 1964; Zytowski, 1969). The outcome of this viewpoint may have been to force women to make unnecessary choices (Faunce, 1967). Gifted women, in particular, may feel this conflict even more intensely as attention to the development of one's recognized and acclaimed talents would seem to be at odds with the cultural expectations for the development of an American woman (Rodenstein, Colangelo & Pfleger, 1977).

The intent of the present study is to describe the antecedents and present lifestyle of gifted women who decided to become career-focused, homemakers, or to integrate the two roles. With women representing forty percent of the work force, it is important to know what women are like who successfully maintain duel roles (career and homemaker) and to learn how these women differ from those women who made choices between career and family (Verheyden & Hilliard, 1975). The focus of this study will be on determining existing differences in parental influence, impact of education, career determinants, self-perceptions and evaluations, and current interests and values between groups with divergent lifestyles. Furthermore, as the study is longitudinal it will be possible to examine the role of variables such as persistence, independence, and mental stability in womens'

career plans (Astin, 1968).

Previous studies that investigated role integration have found that women who combined work with marriage were more satisfied and had higher self-esteem than those who made a choice between the two (Mulvey, 1963; Birnbaum, 1975). This study will focus on factors other than self-esteem to develop a more indepth profile of women who are Career-focused, Homemakers, or Integrators. Implications for counseling will be discussed.

Parental Influence

Little is known about the variables which direct the life planning of women. There has been research to show that there are significant people who frame attitudes towards sex appropriate behavior. One influence is said to be that of parents. Parents' attitudes towards sex roles influence the attitudes of their children. These attitudes, in turn, relate to the actual choices that their children make (Altman & Grossman, 1977).

A relationship has been found to exist between maternal vocational behavior and a woman's values and attitudes towards a career. This relationship, however, is not simplistic or linear. Rather, it is complicated by factors such as education, socio-economic level, degree of mother's role conflict and attitudes of other family members towards mother's employment. It does appear that exposure to a maternal role model who is employed affects the career enrichment of a woman. This "enrichment hypothesis" proposed by Almquist and Angrist (1970)

maintains that women who were exposed to a mother who is employed has a broader, more enriched experience which thus leads to a less stereotyped female role concept. In support of this hypothesis, Almquist and Angrist (1971) found that in order to aspire to a career, women need role models to lend credence to the possibility of combining a vocation and a marriage. There, thus, seems to be a strong relationship between career orientation and mother's employment.

Finally, although it has been hypothesized that a woman's career decisions are related to paternal influence, it is not possible at the present time to formulate a conclusion about the effect of this variable. Not enough research has focused on this specific issue.

In sum, one of the most important parental determinants found to influence the life planning of women is maternal vocational behavior. Influence of paternal vocational behavior is yet undetermined.

Career Determinants

The career-marriage conflict experienced by many women is often precipitated in college (Farmer, 1976). Marital status was found to be one of the most significant determinants of the expectations that senior college woemn had about careers and homemaking (Cook, 1967). Being married and having children were seen as negative predictors in science but not office work careers; being single, on the other hand, was a high positive predictor for the former (Astin & Myint, 1971).

Aptitudes and expressed interests were found to be the best personal predictors of womens' careers (Astin, 1970; Astin & Myint, 1971). Furthermore, level of aspiration in high school and attained educational level were also seen as significant predictors of career paterns in women (Mulvey, 1963).

Finally, in a study of child and adolescent career plans of college women, Harmon (1971) found a typical preference for traditional female occupations and a restricted range of occupational choice early in life. Some of the factors facilitating change to male oriented vocations are work values, role models, and work experience (Almquist, 1974). However, while factors such as marital status, role models, and work experience have been found to effect female career choice, research to date has not studied the impact of career preparedness (e.g, information related to decision making) upon womens' career choices.

Determinants and Impact of Educational Attainment

In a study on gifted women at the University of Minnesota, Faunce (1967) found more graduates to have Liberal Arts, Social Science, Interdepartmental, Education, Home Economics and double majors. More non-graduates had majors in English, Linguistics, languages, natural sciences, math, and Business Administration. Significant differences in GPA were found between the two groups although not significant enough to account for termination. Finally, the three most common reasons given for leaving the University were: marriage, insufficient

finances; and a lack of or dissatisfaction with a major. Finally, in a related study (Watley & Kaplan, 1971) marital status, home background, and personality characteristics were found to be related to educational attainment.

Educational attainment was also found to be an important predictor of womens' careers (Astin, 1970; Astin & Myint, 1971). However, while college has been found to have an impact on womens' later lifestyles, there is a lack of a clear picture of the precise effects that higher education has on women. Lifestyle in terms of social class, income, and occupation is more predictable than lifestyle in terms of the priority placed on advanced education, marriage, family, leisure, and work.

In sum, factors affecting womens' educational attainment are college major, financial circumstances, marital status, home background, and personality characteristics. However, while educational attainment was found to be an important determinant of women's careers and lifestyles, its precise impact on the latter has been difficult to determine.

Research Procedures

Subjects in the present study were female gifted students who participated in the Guidance Institute for Talented Students at the University of Wisconsin since 1957. The age range of the subjects was

from 24 to 35. Subjects were identified as gifted by their school during their freshman year of high school. Varied methods of identification were used (e.g., standardized tests, teacher recommendations, academic achievement, demonstrated leadership ability). The data in this study was collected during the 1978 follow-up study. All subjects responded to a mailed questionnaire which surveyed present career development and lifestyles.*

In order to form the three groups of interest in this study (Career-focused, Homemaker, and Integrator), the respondents were categorized according to the lifestyle variables under consideration. The Career group (C) was defined as: 1) being single, widowed, separated or divorced; 2) having no children; and 3) having a full-time career. The Homemaker group (H) was defined as: 1) either married or remarried; 2) widowed, separated or divorced with children; and 3) listing homemaker as their occupation. The Integrator group (I) was defined as: 1) being married or remarried; 2) having children and 3) having a full-time career. The final sample was: Career Group = 79; Homemakers = 55; and Integrators = 67. The total sample includes 201 subjects.

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*A copy of this questionnaire will be furnished upon request by the authors.

Results

The results seem to dispel some of the myths that have been traditionally associated with the forced choice between career and family that many women believe they must make. In addition, influences which have been found to be important in the career choices of women in other studies (e.g., mother's occupation) were found to be insignificant in this population (see Tables 1 and 2). A profile of each group follows. These descriptions will be followed by a summary of the conclusions in regard to the determinants looked at in this study (i.e., parental influence, education, career, interests and values). Finally, implications for counseling will be discussed.

Career Group

During their career development, the career group repeatedly seemed to be unaware of or indifferent to their parents' attitudes toward their career goals. Their career goals appeared to be defined during high school and were pursued until attained. Unlike the other two groups, this group was interested in Investigative occupations (e.g., physician, dentist, physicist) as well as Social ones (Holland, 1959). This interest was reported from their earliest career choice and continued through high school and college until the career goal was actualized despite their parents' preference for them to pursue Social occupations.

Table 1

Significant Variable	Adult Life Pattern C N=79 %	H N=55 %	I N=67 %	Chi Square	D.F.	Level of Significance
First occupation that appealed (Holland Codes)						
REALISTIC	5	3	7	52.99	40	p <.08
INVESTIGATIVE	30.4	11.9	19.4			
ARTISTIC	15	14	12			
SOCIAL	33	58	49			
ENTERPRISING	1	0	4			
CONVENTIONAL	3	9	1			
Did parents respond positively to career choice?						
NO ANSWER	19	7	6			
YES	67	75	83	9.14	4	p <.05
NO	11	18	10			
At H.S. graduation what career appealed to you? (Holland Codes)						
REALISTIC	3	1	5			
INVESTIGATIVE	27	9	21	53.29	38	p <.05
ARTISTIC	13	9	10			
SOCIAL	25	56	42			
ENTERPRISING	1	0	0			
CONVENTIONAL	2	3	7			
How many children do you plan?						
NONE	35	2	1			
1-3	38	87	85	73.9	2	p <.0000
UNCERTAIN	19	4	2			

Table 1 (Continued)

Significant Variable	Adult Life Pattern C N=79 %	H N=55 %	I N=67 %	Chi Square	D.F.	Level of Significance
What aspects of life are satisfying?						
Work						
NOT SATISFIYING	13	38	13			
SATISFYING	87	60	86	25.19	6	p <.0003
Recognition for Accomplishment						
NOT SATISFYING	27	47	18			
SATISFYING	73	53	82	13.08	4	p <.01
Avocation or Hobbies						
NOT SATISFYING	10	24	18			
SATISFYING	90	76	82	14.90	4	p <.005
Children						
NOT SATISFYING	99	4	5			
SATISFYING	1	96	96	177.56	4	p <.000
Income						
NOT SATISFYING	54	75	48			
SATISFYING	46	25	52	15.84	4	p <.003
Religion						
NOT SATISFYING	66	40	46			
SATISFYING	34	60	54	11.67	4	p <.02
Community Service						
NOT SATISFYING	84	66	63			
SATISFYING	17	35	37	9.60	4	p <.04

Table 1 (Continued)

Significant Variable	Adult Life Pattern C N=79 %	H N=55 %	I N=67 %	Chi Square	D.F.	Level of Significance
Factors which have contributed to life accomplishments						
Personality						
NOT CONTRIBUTED	23	46	25			
CONTRIBUTED	77	53	75	12.84	6	p <.04
Good Mental Stability						
NOT CONTRIBUTED	29	27	9			
CONTRIBUTED	71	71	91	15.28	6	p <.01
Significant Others						
NOT CONTRIBUTED	75	40	48			
CONTRIBUTED	25	60	52	21.24	4	p <.0003

Table 2

Variables in Which no Significant Differences Were Found Between Groups

Parental Influence	Career Development	Self-Assessment	Current Interests and Values
1) Parents' plan for their daughters.	1) Age women began thinking about life's work.	1) Contribution of superior mental ability to life accomplishments (L.A.)	1) Satisfaction derived from marriage or close personal relationships.
2) Parents' encouragement for daughters' attending college.	2) Perceived career preparedness at high school graduation.	2) Contribution of education to L.A.	
3) Mother's occupation		3) Contribution of good social adjustment to L.A.	
4) Father's occupation		4) Contribution of persistence in working towards a goal to L.A.	
		5) Contribution of good work habits to L.A.	
		6) Contribution of parental influence to L.A.	
		7) Contribution of health to L.A.	
		8) Contribution of luck to L.A.	
		9) Women's perceptions of how well they lived up to their educational & occupational abilities.	

Furthermore, this group reported deriving much satisfaction from their work, and from recognition for accomplishments. Finally, the stereotypic profile of a single career woman has tended to portray her as socially inept or isolated and dedicated solely to her work. This portrait, however, was not validated by the data collected from the gifted career women in this study. Instead, these women reported deriving much satisfaction from their avocations (hobbies) and close personal relationships as well as from work. Income, however, was not a particularly strong source of satisfaction for them; nor was religion, community activities, or children.

Another element in the stereotypic picture of a woman who chooses to be career-focused is that once a choice is made, there is no longer the possibility of returning to a homemaker or integrator role. This rigidity in role choice was not validated. Thirty-eight percent of career women in this study do plan to have children at some point in their lives and another nineteen percent were still uncertain of their plans.

Finally, when queried as to the factors which determined their life accomplishments, the career group rated personality and good mental stability as strong contributors. Coversely, this group believed that significant others contributed little.

To summarize, subjects in the career group seemed to have identified a career and actively pursued it regardless of whether significant

others approved or not. Furthermore, while they chose a career-focused lifestyle at this point in their lives, they did not seem to view that choice as one which necessitated the elimination of close personal relationships and other interests or of future possibilities of having children.

Homemakers

From their earliest career choice through high school graduation, the homemakers group's career development appeared to be focused primarily on Social occuaptions such as elementary education and librarian. These occupations have traditionally been female-dominated. There was little interest expressed by members of this group in the more traditionally male dominated occupations (e.g., physician, engineer, physicist). Furthermore, homemakers received support from their parents who also tended to chose a limited range of occupations for their daughters (i.e., Social occupations). One wonders whether parents of Homemakers would have approved of any career choice or if the parents' choice was adopted by their daughters. Sixty-nine percent of the Homemaker group believed that their parents had an influence upon them. The degree or type of this influence, however, is unknown.

The Homemakers in this study tended to derive less satisfaction from their work than the other two groups. Sixty percent of the Homemakers reported satisfaction from their work versus eighty-four

percent of the workers (Career and Integrator groups). Personal relationships, however, were very important to the Homemakers as were their avocations and children. Most of the women in this group plan on having children. Finally, despite the stereotypic picture of the housewife who gets her work-related satisfaction from community activities, this group did not. Community service was not found to be of significant interest to them.

Lastly, the Homemaker group in this study attributed their life accomplishments to significant others, good mental stability, and an adequate education. Their personality was seen as a less important determinant.

Summarizing the profile of the Homemaker group, the variables that were the most prominent were their overwhelming choice of Social occupations, the strong importance that they place upon their children and close personal relationships and the influence and support that they received from significant others.

Integrators

In their career development the Integrators like the Homemakers chose Social occupations as their strongest focal area. However, they also resembled the Career-focused group in that they additionally chose Investigative occupations. Furthermore, this group received overwhelming approval from their parents for their career choice. Although many of their parents chose Social occupations for their daughters, a fair

proportion also chose Investigative careers. Again, it is difficult to determine whether parental influence or support is operating here.

The data from this study again conflicts a common stereotype about women who have both a family and a career. The myth purports that both cannot exist simultaneously and not somehow interfere with each other (Prediser, McLure & Noethe, 1976; Smith, 1976). The women in this group, however, reported satisfaction from their work (86%) and from recognition of their accomplishments (82%). In addition, they reported deriving much satisfaction from their personal relationships (97%), their children (96%), and their avocations (82%).

Finally, more than the other groups, Integrators expressed the belief that good mental stability was an important contributor to their life accomplishments. This could be a result of the strength needed to succeed in both family and work roles.

In summary, the Integrator group seemed to lie in between the Career group and Homemaker group on several continuums (e.g., career choice, sources of satisfaction and family plans). It seems, however, that this combination (dual roles) is a difficult role to adapt to. Great mental stability is needed. The women in this group seemed to gain strength from within and outside themselves. Significant others, including their parents were seen as important but so was their own mental status and strength in persisting towards a goal.

Summary of Career and Lifestyle Determinants and Descriptors of Gifted Women

Previous studies have demonstrated a number of career and lifestyle determinants of women. The present investigation looked at the impact of parental influence, career preparedness and development and educational attainment upon current career and lifestyle patterns, including interests and values, of gifted women.

1) Parental Influence

Parents of subjects in this study overwhelmingly responded positively to the career choices of their daughters. There was, however, a significant difference in the attention that the groups paid to their parents' support or encouragement. Nineteen percent of the Career group did not care about parental support of career choice as compared to only seven percent of the Homemakers and six percent of the Integrators. Furthermore, in contradiction to the "enrichment hypothesis," mothers' and fathers' occupations were not found to be significantly related to the lifestyle of their daughters' choices. Nor were significant differences in encouragement and support from parents in the three groups of their daughters' pursuit of a college education for any career plans that their daughters chose. Finally, there was no relationship between the lifestyle that the women chose and the amount of influence that their mothers and fathers had upon their life accomplishments. There was, however, a significant difference between groups in the contribution of significant others to life accomplishments. In the career group,

seventy-five percent thought significant others did not make a contribution. They, thus seemed to rely on themselves and to view themselves alone as responsible for where they were at that time.

2) Career Preferences and Career Preparedness

There was a significant relationship between lifestyle and both first choice of careers and career choice at high school graduation. The major difference was in the choice of Investigative versus Social occupations. Few women chose occupations in the Realistic or Conventional categories. All groups were strongly represented in the choice of Social occupations. Homemakers were the most represented (58%); Integrators were next (45%); and the Career group was the least (28%). The other occupational category widely chosen was Investigative in which the reverse order was true in terms of career preference. The Career group chose Investigative occupations the most (29%); the Integrators were next (20%); and the Homemakers chose Investigative occupations least of all (10%). This ranking, based on group differences, seems to support the stereotypes that women who are merely interested in a career become mathematicians or physicists and women interested in homemaking become teachers or librarians. The Integrators seemed to be more of a transitional group. They are represented in both categories. Finally, no significant difference was found between groups in their perceived career preparedness at the time of high school graduation.

3) Self-Assessment

There were significant relationships between the lifestyle groups and the factors that they believed contributed to their life accomplishments. The Career group and the Integrators attributed their success to their personalities and to good mental stability. The Homemakers, however, saw significant others as contributing more to their life accomplishments. Thus, those who work seemed to be more internally focused when assessing contributions to their achievements and those whose focus was on the home attributed their life accomplishments to external factors such as significant others.

4) Nuclear Family

There was a significant relationship between lifestyle and number of children planned. Thirty-five percent of Career women planned no children. Yet, fifty-seven percent were either planning children for the future or were uncertain about their plans. They, thus, did not see their choice of lifestyle as remaining rigid but as fairly fluid, moving from Career role to that of the Integrator.

As would be expected, the Career group did not see children as sources of satisfaction in their present lives while the Homemakers did. Integrators, however, expressed as much satisfaction from their children as did the Homemaker group. In addition, they expressed even more satisfaction from their work than the Career group (97% versus 87%). The Integrators, thus seemed to be very satisfied with both work

and children. Thus, one need not rival or interfere with the other. Rather, both career and family can both be sources of satisfaction simultaneously--a choice between the two apparently does not have to be made.

5) Current Interests and Values

There was no relationship between the satisfaction attained from marriage or close personal relationships and chosen lifestyle, dispelling the myth that career women must put their entire energy into their work, thus sacrificing interpersonal relationships. A significant relationship was, however, found between lifestyle and satisfaction derived from work. Most working women reported reaping much satisfaction from work (C = 87% and I = 97%). In contrast, only sixty percent of the Homemaker group reported satisfaction from their housework. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between lifestyle and the amount of satisfaction felt for recognition of accomplishments. Homemakers put less value on this than did the other two groups. There was also a significant difference among groups in the satisfaction that they derived from avocations or hobbies. The Career group overwhelmingly (90%) reported satisfaction from interests outside of work, again dispelling the myth that for a woman to succeed in a career, she must devote all her time and energy to it. Finally, a significant relationship was found between lifestyle group and interest in religion and community service. Neither was highly valued by the career group. Integrators and Homemaker groups were split in the value attributed to both activities.

Implications for Counseling

Based upon the results of the present study, several goals have been articulated which the counselor may bear in mind when working with gifted women. Accompanying each goal are programmatic suggestions for its implementation.

1) Information must be presented to gifted women that dispels societal myths which contribute to a forced choice between career and family.

Among the information which must be provided for gifted women is that a choice between career and family is unnecessary. One-third of this sample was able to successfully integrate work and family. Furthermore, this group reported satisfaction from personal relationships, children, avocations and hobbies, and their work.

A second myth which must be dispelled is the stereotype of the "asocial, single-minded career woman." The career group in this study reported much satisfaction from personal relationships and hobbies as well as their work. Furthermore, the majority of this group did not rule out the possibility of having children.

This leads to the third myth which must be dispelled which is that career and lifestyle planning is irreversable. A woman need not make an irrevocable decision as to whether or not to have children at the time of planning a career. Furthermore, a woman who has opted for the role of homemaker need not forever dismiss the possibility of integrating a career into her lifestyle.

The above information may be transmitted to gifted women through a variety of methods. A section might be included in a course on career development on "Integrating Career and Family: Myths and Methods." A second option would be to present the information in individual and group counseling as the need arises. Finally, exposing gifted female students to role models who have successfully integrated career and family might provide additional credibility to the data.

2) The personal growth and development of autonomy of gifted women must be facilitated.

Good mental stability was viewed by the gifted women in this sample as a prime contributor to their life accomplishments. This was particularly the case in the group that integrated career and family. Furthermore, the women in the sample who pursued careers demonstrated significantly more independent attitudes than those who did not.

Neither of the above findings is very surprising. Mental stability would seem to be particularly important in the demanding task of balancing a home and career. Furthermore, in a society where until recently a woman was discouraged from participating in the work force, independence of judgment would certainly facilitate the pursuit of a career.

It thus seems essential that counselors provide experiences that enable gifted women to become better psychologically adjusted and more independent. Experiences of this nature might even be more important in helping this group to utilize their full potential than the dissemination

of career information as no significant differences were found between groups on reported career preparedness.

Finally, the type of experiences which might be offered to accomplish this goal run the full gamut of counseling services. Individual counseling might be employed to increase gifted womens' self-esteem. Assertiveness training could be provided to increase their independence. Lastly, family counseling might be used to teach parents to support the growth and autonomy of their daughters.

Summary

Many myths currently exist which have caused women to view career and family as mutually exclusive options. Gifted women, in particular may suffer from this conflict. From data collected from a ten year follow-up questionnaire, the present study attempted to determine and describe the antecedents and present lifestyles of 201 gifted women who became homemakers, career-focused, or integrated the two.

Results of this study seem to dispel some of the myths associated with the forced choice many women believe they must make. One third of the sample was able to successfully integrate both career and family. Career-oriented women in this sample derived satisfaction from personal relationships and hobbies as well as their work. Furthermore, 57% of the career group still considered the possibility of having children.

In addition, career preparedness and maternal occupation were not found to differentiate between the groups in this study. Rather,

the perception of good mental stability as a contributor to one's life achievements was found to be significantly higher among the Integrators than in the other two groups. Furthermore, attitudes indicative of independence were more prominent among the groups that pursued careers.

Finally, based on the results of this study two counseling goals were identified for working with gifted women: 1) providing gifted women with information geared towards dispelling the myths that force them to chose between career and family; and 2) facilitating the personal growth and development of autonomy of gifted women. Several methods were suggested for accomplishing these goals. By implementing programs geared towards this end, it is hoped that gifted women will feel less compelled to make a choice between career and family. As a consequence, greater opportunity will exist for their leading a rich and satisfying lifestyle and greater use will be made of their multiple abilities.

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